



## **Analyzing the Idea of Post-truth in Julian Barnes's**

### ***The Sense of an Ending***

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### **Abstract**

*Historically, humanity has consistently sought to understand the nature of reality and truth, their formation, and methods of verification, leading to extensive discourse among scholars across several disciplines, including sociology, psychology, history, and literature. Consequently, the most recent perspective proposed and articulated by postmodernists as an assertion, the assertion, endorsed by new historicists, that reality or truth is constructed through memory and cannot be confined to a singular, immutable fact, constitutes the foundation of this research, aiming to illuminate the essence of reality or truth from a literary perspective (Bradley, 2011, p. 387). This claim is fundamentally personal and adaptable, shaped by several interpretations from various perspectives that may fluctuate depending on the context (Lansdown, 2017, p.38). In this context, Julian Barnes's *The Sense of an Ending* (2011), structured as a 'vollendungsroman,' serves as a direct rebuttal to postmodernists and new historicists who assert the unreliability and inaccessibility of reality/truth, positing that pure truth is nonexistent. By depicting his character Tony Webster in a highly realistic manner, who is ensnared in his present due to his fallible memories of the past, Barnes allows readers to evaluate the reliability and accessibility of reality/truth as influenced by memory, leading to the profound realization that objective reality/truth cannot be derived from memories. Ultimately, reality or truth derived from recollections might mislead an individual in their present or future actions, akin to the character Tony Webster.*

**Keywords:** Postmodernism, Reality, Unreliability, History, Memory, Post-truth

### **Introduction:**

Julian Barnes, born Julian Patrick Barnes on January 19, 1946, in Leicester, England, to a family of French teachers, is recognized as one of the most esteemed contemporary postmodern English novelists and essayists, occasionally writing under the pseudonyms Edward Pygge and Dan Kavanagh. Embracing the notion that

"To write, one must persuade oneself that it is "a novel milestone for you and a significant turning point in the entire history of the book" (Stout, 1992, p. 68)

Barnes authored numerous experimental novels, initially perceived as likely to fail, yet he demonstrated the contrary (Holmes, 2009, p. 12). Notable works include Flaubert's *Parrot* (1984), *Staring at the Sun* (1986), *The Porcupine* (1992), *The Sense of an Ending* (2011), *The Noise of Time* (2016), and his most recent novel, *The Only Story* (2018). The literary acclaim of

Barnes is demonstrated by numerous accolades, including the 'Somerset Maugham Award' in 1981 and the 'Gutenberg Prize' in 1987. He was nominated for the Man Booker Prize three times before achieving success with his 2011 novel, *The Sense of an Ending*, subsequently followed by *The Noise of Time* (2016) and *The Only Story* (2018) (Ousby, 2003, p.65). *The Sense of an Ending* is divided into two sections titled "One" and "Two," narrated by Tony Webster, whose perspective reflects "an instinct for self-preservation" as a solitary retired man. The narrative encompasses four pivotal events: (1) Tony's visit to Veronica's family, (2) Tony's breakup with Veronica, (3) Veronica's subsequent relationship with Adrian, and (4) Adrian's suicide (Barnes, 2011, p. 42, p. 64, p. 131). The initial segment illustrates the ambiance of the 1960s, offering a perspective on Tony Webster's outlook during his youth. The narrative commences with a sequence of reminiscences from the protagonist, Tony Webster's, high school years. Tony Webster presents Adrian Finn as his new acquaintance among his other two mates, Alex and Colin. Among his acquaintances, the most intriguing is Adrian Finn, who captivates the class as an exceptionally intelligent, well-read, and extremely sophisticated kid. It is particularly following Adrian's conversation with Professor Hunt that captivates the guys, prompting them to incorporate him into their "book-hungry, sex-hungry, meritocratic, anarchistic" collective (Barnes, 2011, p. 10). One of the most horrific experiences Tony cannot forget is the loss of his friend Robson, who is believed to have committed himself due to his girlfriend's pregnancy. Amidst the flood of his memories, Tony recalls his lover Veronica Ford, a petite woman who despised Webster's musical preferences yet esteemed his literary choices, as well as his encounter with her family. Nevertheless, this connection is brief and ultimately concludes in a breakup. In his final year at university, Tony discovers that Adrian is in a relationship with Veronica. Eventually, Tony discovers that Adrian has taken his own life. The second portion of the narrative focusses on Tony Webster's current life in his mid-sixties. He engages the reader with profound reflections on his memoirs, similar to the initial section. He discloses that he is divorced from his second wife, Margaret, and has a daughter named Susie and a grandson, who is the son of Susie. The narrative commences with a correspondence from Mrs. Sarah Ford, notifying Tony that Veronica's mother has bequeathed him £500 and two documents, one of which remains with Veronica, while the other originates from Adrian's diary. Curious about Veronica's mother's situation, Tony resolves to reach out to Veronica to obtain the complete journal. He sends numerous emails to Veronica requesting the journal; nevertheless, Veronica chooses to provide Tony only a single page that details Adrian's contemplative reflections on life. One day, they reunite, and Veronica presents Tony with the letter he had previously delivered to Adrian in his youth. Upon reading the letter, Tony contemplates how he composed such an unfriendly and harsh correspondence, which ultimately astonishes him profoundly. Once more, Tony convinces Veronica to meet, aspiring to obtain the entire diary from her. Upon their meeting, Tony observes several mentally disabled guys accompanied by their careers. Captivated by curiosity, Tony returns to the same pub to encounter one of the disabled men. Upon seeing him, Tony abruptly recalls Adrian upon observing the resemblance between the man's features and Adrian's. He promptly emails Veronica to apologize for his oversight regarding her and Adrian's son.

Veronica only replies,

"You simply do not comprehend, do you?" However, you ultimately did not. Barnes (2011, p. 100).

Upon revisiting the tavern where he encounters the man, Tony discovers that Adrian is the father and Sarah Ford, Veronica's mother, is the mother of this mentally ill child. Upon recovering the majority of his memories, he begins to contemplate the necessity of reconciling with his history and its repercussions: "There is accumulation." Responsibility exists. Furthermore, there exists turmoil. "There is significant turmoil" (Barnes, 2011, p. 150).

### **Method:**

The term "postmodernism," characterized by skepticism and subjectivism, emerged after the Second World War. It is defined by a widespread distrust of truth and an acute awareness of the role of ideology in exerting and sustaining economic and political power. It was particularly after the globe observed the impact of the First globe War on Western morale that the experience of Nazi totalitarianism and mass extermination, the peril of total annihilation by the atomic bomb, the ongoing degradation of the natural environment, and the alarming issue of overpopulation have significantly intensified the contemporary questioning of life and reality/truth in a unique manner (Abrams & Harpham, 2012, p. 227). Postmodernism, as a "amorphous" concept, is currently linked to various fields including literature, social sciences, art, music, architecture, philosophy, and technology. It emphasizes a departure from traditionally accepted constructs. Hutcheon articulates that the primary objective of postmodernism is to de-naturalize dominant aspects of our existence, highlighting that entities we perceive as "natural," such as capitalism, patriarchy, and liberal humanism, are, in fact, cultural constructs created by us rather than inherent realities (Hutcheon, 2007, p. 12-13). Consequently, given the socio-cultural setting, literature has experienced a significant transformation in both form and substance. Postmodernism is characterized as a "movement within contemporary literature and criticism that challenges the assertions of literature and art regarding truth and human value" (Bradbury, 1990, p. 219). Consequently, the postmodern literary text allows the reader to evaluate the legitimacy of truth and reality shaped by prior traditions or cultures. In this context, postmodernists dismiss the notion that literature serves as a dependable source of universal truths, asserting that neither universal truths nor a stable, quantifiable reality exist; instead, they contend that "truth is rather created than discovered" (Rorty, 2009, p. 53). This has arisen from the notion that the universe inhabited by humans is only chaos, which cannot be encapsulated by any singular formula (Fuchs, 1992, p. 106). In these situations, authors have begun to assess and delineate the concepts of history, memory, and truth. To illustrate their challenge to reality and truth, as well as the interplay between history and memory, they employ various methods to interrogate the validity of truth and reality. This is achieved by scrutinizing "traditional methods of representation, narrative construction, verisimilitude, and historical truth" through specific literary techniques, including "unreliable narrators, multiple narrative frames, stylistic transformations, blends of magical and realistic events, and parodies of earlier literary and historical works" (Malpas, 2010, p. 101). The postmodern question of reality and truth resides here, engaging the reader in unravelling the complexities, as articulated by Bran Nicol (2009):

Postmodern fiction presents its readers with a challenge: instead of enjoying it passively, they have to work to understand it, to question their own responses, and to examine their views about what fiction and reality are. Yet accepting this challenge is what makes postmodern writing so pleasurable to read and rewarding to study. (p. 1)

Likewise, in an interview with Jeffrey Brown about *Sense of an Ending*, titled as "Conversation: Julian Barnes, Winner of the 2011 Man Booker Prize", Barnes expounds what the motive behind him to have him pen this novel was, as follows:

I wanted to write a book about time and memory, about what time does to memory, how it changes it, and what memory does to time. It's also a book about discovering at a certain point in your life that some key things that you've always believed were wrong. This is something that I started thinking about a few years ago, and it's probably one of the preoccupations that you have as you age. You have your own memories of life; you've got the story that you tell mainly to yourself about what your life has been. Something happens, someone reports something from 20 or 30 years ago, and you realize that what you'd believed is not the case. So, I wanted to write about that. (PBS News Hour, 2011)

Contemporary writers, inspired by fresh perspectives on human experiences, feel compelled to explore the lives of the elderly, the focus of gerontological studies. This exploration has led to the emergence of new literary genres, including midlife bildung or "midlife progress novel" (Gullette, 1988, p. xii), "reifungsroman" (Waxman, 1990, p. 183), and "vollendungsroman." Constance Rooked proposed the term "novel of completion or winding up" to confine the focus to "the first phase of the life cycle (childhood and youth) as a preparation for life in society," thereby emphasizing one's experiences in the last phase (1992, p. 245). Upon evaluation, *The Sense of an Ending* emerges as a quintessential example of a vollendungsroman, centered on an elderly man preoccupied with his later life via the lens of his recollections. Julian Barnes's *Sense of an Ending*, composed in a realist tradition, portrays the skewed recollections of the first-person narrator, Tony Webster, an elderly man striving to reconcile with his past. By employing a first-person narrator who is inherently unreliable, Barnes draws attention to his endeavor to scrutinize the trustworthiness of truth and reality as presented through memories, as his narrator embarks on a journey for personal history. Similar to Julian Barnes, it is evident throughout his narrative that memory plays a key role in crafting one's personal history, allowing for the inclusion of fictitious events that were never experienced or the omission of ones that are profoundly terrible. The precision and reliability of memory remain a contentious issue among psychologists, historians, and literary academics, with no definitive resolution. Consequently, the narrative becomes vague and skeptical, since its reliability is obscured (Balkaya, 2019, p. 134). In its most restricted definition, memory is the faculty that allows an individual to recall experiences, prior events, or locations. Fleming characterizes it as "the faculty of the mind by which information is encoded, stored and retrieved" (2019, p. 91), whereas Bradley proposes that it constitutes a form of storytelling influenced by various contexts, elaborating that

"[m]emory can be active storytelling, individual reflection, or shared silence surrounding mutual encounters. Memory contextualizes our present condition and serves as a foundation for new experiences" (2012, p.21).

Memory, while functioning as a recollection of past events documented in literary forms such as diaries, documents, autobiographies, and novels, should not be perceived merely as a straightforward recording of the past, present reality, or history. Instead, it is "a deliberate piercing-together of retrieved information and other relevant information in an effort to make sense of the past" (Gallo, 2006, p. 13). It is essential to recognize that memories do not constitute reliable representations of events, as they are generated by individuals both consciously and unconsciously, and are susceptible to considerable alteration through "transience, absent-mindedness, blocking, misattribution, suggestibility, bias, and persistence," collectively referred to as the "seven sins of memory" by Daniel L. Schacter (2011, p. 4). Moreover, it must not be overlooked that memory encompasses a sequence of constructed events, which marks the inception of its connection with history, as emphasized by Oakes and Hyman:

"What people remember will be constructed from remaining materials and from general schematic knowledge structures...." Memory's construction implies that history is similarly constructed" (2000, p. 62).

It is evident that both personal history and conventional history may be deemed untrustworthy narratives of events, influenced by the fallibility of memory (Balkaya, 2020, pp. 61-62). In recounting memories, a notable and tangible aspect is the narrator's unreliability, as they convey their personal history from a subjective perspective, disclosing that their account comprises

"a mixture of knowledge, lies, self-deception, delusion and plain error" (Currie, 2010, p. 67).

Holman et al. propose that an unreliable narrator is

"a narrator or viewpoint character who may be in error in his or her understanding or report of things and who thus leaves readers without the guides essential for making judgements about the character and the actions with any confidence that their conclusions are those intended by the author" (2010, p. 182)

which is quite noteworthy. In addition to focusing on the theme of the unreliable narrator, *The Sense of an Ending* also addresses "self-deception," which Marcus describes as "an unstable mental phenomenon" stemming from a simultaneous desire to reveal and conceal the truth (Marcus, 2016, p. 129). A self-deceptive narrator frequently conveys their narratives in an ambiguous and contradictory manner, exemplified by Tony Webster in the novel. As a character, he constructs a narrative identity by initially recognizing past actions, subsequently renouncing his former self, and ultimately arriving at the present. This process of narration results in transformations in self-awareness and self-perception (Vaughan, 2007, pp. 399-400). Equipped with these elements, it can be asserted that an unreliable narrator is indeed comparable to a self-deceptive narrator. This is due to their convergence on the notion that they fail to transparently disclose the truth, instead presenting a recall of the past as a distorted narrative that is "as internally consistent and natural as possible, and as closely confirming as possible to the evident facts" (Fingarette, 1969, p. 49). Postmodernist authors highlight the fictionality and multiplicity of truth, necessitating an unreliable narrator as an essential instrument in their endeavor to

construct a narrative that both the narrator and the reader are compelled to accept as fact. This paper seeks to illustrate the postmodern challenge of truth and reality as shaped by memory in Julian Barnes's novel *Sense of an Ending*, through the ageing first-person narrator's pursuit of truth in his personal history, asserting that there is no singular, immutable truth, but rather multiple truths subject to change, as evidenced in the life of the fictional character Tony Webster.

### Discussion:

Commencing his account by enumerating various occurrences from his sixty years, Tony seeks to uncover the truth obscured in his past, lacking definitive evidence. From the initial line of the novel's first section, the narrator states, "I remember, in no particular order," and subsequently depicts imagery such as "a shiny inner wrist, a river, a steam rising from a wet sink..."

He recalls and concludes the paragraph with the statement:

"This last isn't something I actually observed, but what one ultimately remembers does not always align with what one has witnessed" (Barnes, 2011, p. 3).

This is an unconventional commencement of a novel in contrast to standard narratives, so categorizing the text as postmodern in this aspect. He reflects on his adolescence and youth, emphasizing his inability to recall any incidents or emotions associated with prior events. He contemplates time and the emotions he cannot fully comprehend:

"Some emotions accelerate it, others decelerate it; at times, it appears to vanish – until the moment it truly disappears, never to reappear" (Barnes, 2011, p. 3).

Following these reflections, he resolves to commence his narration with a disclaimer:

"I must briefly revisit certain incidents that have evolved into anecdotes, to some imprecise memories that time has distorted into certainties."

If I can no longer ascertain the real occurrences, I can at least be faithful to the impressions those facts imparted. "That is the utmost I can achieve" (Barnes, 2011, p.4). Tony consistently highlights his struggle to recount his own history through his present memories from the outset to the conclusion. He consistently seeks to make his reader cognizant of the inaccuracy of his narrative, rooted in his skewed recollection, as he reiterates throughout the second part of the novel while reflecting on his past:

"What initially started as a resolve to acquire inherited property evolved into a more significant endeavor, one that impacted the entirety of my existence, encompassing time and memory" (Barnes, 2011, p. 130).

This is when he demonstrates his sincerity in desiring to share his recollections with the reader.

Barnes illustrates the fallibility of memory and truth through his narrator, Tony. Initially, he feels that Adrian's suicide was a direct consequence of Veronica's pregnancy; however, it is ultimately disclosed at the conclusion of the novel that this is merely one of his erroneous memories. Tony learns that a newborn, now a middle-aged crippled man residing in a nursing facility, was named Adrian in honor of his deceased friend. Adrian, the crippled man, is revealed to be the son of Mrs. Sarah Ford, Veronica's mother, and a friend of Tony. Tony regards him as their son based on the presumption that he is the product of their relationship, retaining this belief until he discovers the truth. The fallibility

of Tony's memories is seen in the scene where Veronica presents him with the letter he composed to Adrian in his youth: "I reread this letter several times." I could hardly refute its authorship or its unattractiveness. All I could assert was that I had been its creator at that time, but I am no longer its creator now. Indeed, I did not recognize that aspect of myself from which the letter originated. However, this may have only constituted additional self-deception" (Barnes, 2011, p. 97). He entirely neglects his letter expressing his animosity for the relationship between Veronica and Adrian. He then realizes the degree to which the letter is distasteful, replete with invectives that he cannot believe he authored upon reading it:

"Dear Adrian – or rather, Dear Adrian and Veronica (greetings, Bitch, and welcome to this correspondence), You are indeed well-suited for each other, and I wish you abundant happiness. I anticipate your involvement will result in irreversible mutual harm. "I trust you will lament the day I made your acquaintance" (Barnes, 2011, p. 95).

Upon rereading it multiple times, he profoundly experiences sorrow for his actions, as evidenced by his statement:

"Consider the intensity of the impact when I revisit my words." "They appeared to be an ancient curse I had forgotten even articulating" (Barnes, 2011, p. 138).

This letter appears to be a significant symbol throughout the story, referencing his lost memories. The reader cannot access any information on this letter until it is disclosed by Veronica. Upon revelation, every fact Tony holds in his life disintegrates, altering the trajectory of his pursuit for personal historical truth. Barnes emphasizes this when Tony reflects on life and memory in contrast to reality during his challenging times: "How often do we narrate our own life story?" How frequently do we modify, enhance, or make subtle omissions? As life progresses, fewer individuals remain to contest our narrative, to remind us that our existence is not our own, but rather the tale we have constructed about it. "Communicated to others, but primarily to ourselves" (Barnes, 2011, p. 95). Julian Barnes, addressing his apprehension regarding the unreliability and subjectivity of memories, also explores the elusiveness of historical truths in his novel, paralleling the skepticism of truth posited by postmodern theorists. This is evident in Popkewitz's assertion that

"Postmodernism, as articulated by Foucault, Derrida, and Roland Barthes, suggests the possibility that there is no truth whatsoever." What remains for them is a text, which can be interpreted in several ways" (2001, p. 33).

The repudiation of historical realism constitutes a crucial theme upon which postmodernism relies (Zagorin, 1999, p. 15). Tony Webster emerges as a character who interrogates history from the outset of the novel, exemplified in the scene where students deliberate on "the origins of the First World War: specifically, the responsibility of Archduke Franz Ferdinand's assassin for initiating the conflict" (Barnes, 2011, p. 10). Engaged in the discussion, Tony struggles to identify the correct answer but concentrates on the essence of history and historiography. He believes that the Serbian gunman, whose name he no longer recalls, may have initiated the war, but he also considers other historical events that had set the conflicting nations on an unavoidable path to confrontation. Others preferred the one hundred percent responsibility of historical forces, which had placed the antagonistic nations on an inevitable collision course: "Europe was a powder keg waiting to blow", and so on. The more anarchic, like Colin, argued that everything was down to

chance, that the world existed in a state of perpetual chaos, and only some primitive storytelling instinct, itself doubtless a hangover from religion, retrospectively imposed meaning on what might or might not have happened. (Barnes, 2011, p. 11)

Barnes, via Tony, underscored that history is solely a construct of historiography, therefore rendering it susceptible to various readings across different contexts. This ultimately results in the conclusion that there is no singular truth in the cosmos. Similarly, another perspective on the essence of history, rather than this particular event, is provided by Adrian Finn. In favor of the essence of history lies in its inherent subjectivity, which emerges immediately from historiography—the examination of historical writing and recorded narratives.

It seems to me that there is – was – a chain of individual responsibilities, all of which were necessary, but not so long a chain that everybody can simply blame everyone else. But of course, my desire to ascribe responsibility might be more a reflection of my own cast of minds than a fair analysis of what happened. That's one of the central problems of history, isn't it, sir? The question of subjective versus objective interpretation, the fact that we need to know the history of the historian in order to understand the version that is being put in front of us. (Barnes, 2011, p. 11)

Barnes emphasizes the intimate connection between documentation and memory in constructing history, aptly articulated by Adrian Finn: "History is the certainty produced at the point where the imperfections of memory meet the inadequacies of documentation" (Barnes, 2011, p. 17). Julian Barnes appears to imply that the 'imperfections' of memory and history manifest as metamorphosis of untrustworthy narratives, a theme he consistently explores throughout the work. He demonstrates the unreliability and subjectivity of textual documents via his narrator/character Tony Webster. By portraying him as a character attempting to eliminate documents associated with Veronica, Barnes implies that historical documents, upon which history relies, are fundamentally insignificant, as they are susceptible to destruction or manipulation in various ways. The work vividly illustrates that historical truths are unreachable. Tony's efforts to obtain Adrian's diary underscore its significance as a historical document reflecting his past facts. Although the narrative discloses that this document is bequeathed to him, he is unable to obtain it at his desired moment. The diary in the novel functions as a historical document reflecting his former realities, however he ultimately relinquishes the pursuit of historical truth about himself. Furthermore, Barnes reiterates that any historical record is subject to interpretation from several perspectives that continually evolve. This is again most effectively illustrated in the scenario where Tony fails to comprehend the extract Veronica presents to him during their encounter. While it addresses certain enquiries concerning his curiosities about Adrian, Tony remains perplexed until the care worker informs him that Veronica is Adrian's sister (the disabled individual), not his mother, and that Adrian Finn is the father, as explicitly clarified by the barman when Tony seeks to understand Adrian's history.

Oh – Veronica – yes, I'm sorry. I remember he – Adrian – called her Mary. I suppose that's what she calls herself with him. It's her second name. But I knew her – know her – as Veronica." Over his shoulder I could see the five of them standing anxiously, still not drinking, watching us. I felt ashamed that my presence bothered them." If you were a friend of his father's – "And



his mother's." "Then I think you don't understand." At least he put it differently from others. "I don't?" "Mary isn't his mother. Mary's his sister. Adrian's mother died about six months ago. He took it very badly. That's why he's been ... having problems lately."

Nevertheless, he is unable to ascertain the reasons for Adrian's suicide, and it remains perpetually unknowable. It is evident that records alone are insufficient to uncover the veracity of one's personal history, as they are inherently subjective and unreliable. Throughout the novel, Barnes's employment of realist language profoundly impacts the reader while challenging the authenticity of reality and truth through unreliable narration. The narrator, a significant problem in postmodern literature. Although the novel concentrates on multiple realities and truths that may shift due to several events, it portrays the characters and happenings using genuine language. This is particularly evident in the scenario where Tony delineates the physical attributes of his ex-girlfriend Veronica and his current circumstances.

My girlfriend was called Veronica Mary Elizabeth Ford, information (by which I mean her middle names) it took me two months to extract. She was reading Spanish, she liked poetry, and her father was a civil servant. About five foot two with rounded, muscular calves, mid-brown hair to her shoulders, blue-grey eyes behind blue-framed spectacles, and a quick yet withholding smile. I thought she was nice. I'm retired now. I have my flat with my possessions. I keep up with a few drinking pals, and have some women friends - platonic, of course. (And they're not part of the story either.) I'm a member of the local history society, though less excited than some about what metal detectors unearth. A while ago, I volunteered to run the library at the local hospital; I go round the wards delivering, collecting, recommending. (Barnes, 2011, p. 55)

Notably, particularly in the second quotation, Barnes's phrasing is markedly authentic and realistic. In comparison to Charles Dickens' realistic portrayal of the character Pip in his work *Great Expectations*, which employs first-person narration, there appears to be little distinction between the two authors' application of realistic techniques in their narratives.

I give Pirrip as my father's family name, on the authority of his tombstone and my sister - Mrs. Joe Gargery, who married the blacksmith. As I never saw my father or my mother, and never saw any likeness of either of them (for their days were long before the days of photographs), my first fancies regarding what they were like, were unreasonably derived from their tombstones. (Dickens, 2002, p. 3)

This is a distinguishing quality that sets Barnes apart from other postmodern authors. While reading the novel, one can readily empathize with the narrator, Tony Webster, and arrive at the conclusion that one may experience a similar situation in their lifetime. Ultimately, each individual possesses their own memories, which exert an influence throughout their lifetime. Nonetheless, a notable distinction exists the comparison of Julian Barnes's application of realism with that of the 19th century. It might be stated that the realistic style in 19th-century novels, particularly in character portrayal, is so lucid that it provides the reader with an authentic representation of the character as they are; nevertheless, Julian Barnes's application of this technique in character description differs

significantly. The author provides no explicit information regarding the characters, with the exception of the narrator/character, which remains contentious. This fundamentally resides in his application of realistic technique, distinct from 19th-century realist novelists, as he seeks to portray a character that aligns with his objective of examining truth through the depiction of subjective interpretations of reality. Barnes's selection of the title "*The Sense of an Ending*" is significantly influenced by Frank Kermode's work of the same name (1967), particularly regarding its narrative and thematic elements. This connection can be examined through two primary lenses: (1) "the ways we attempt to make sense of our lives" (Kermode, 2000, p. 3) and (2) the assertion that "what is true about fiction is also true in real life," as interpreted by McAdams, who further posits that "the sense of an ending shapes how stories unfold and how characters' lives evolve in quality fiction."

Similar processes may prevail in real human lives as an expression of the art of personality development. Outside the pages of literary fiction, real people imagine how their lives will end up, and those projections for the future feedback to color the way people see the present and understand the past. For everyday autobiographical authors like you and me, who I am in the present and who I was in the past are shaped in my own mind by how I believe things will end for me in the future. (2018, p. 304)

This is most effectively illustrated in one of the concluding moments, where Tony Webster attains a complete enlightenment as he examines his life and the present, which oscillates between the subjective or fictitious and the real.

You get towards the end of life – no, not life itself, but of something else: the end of any likelihood of change in that life. You are allowed a long moment of pause, time enough to ask the question: what else have I done wrong? I thought of a bunch of kids in Trafalgar Square. I thought of a young woman dancing, for once in her life. I thought of what I couldn't know or understand now, of all that couldn't ever be known or understood. I thought of Adrian's definition of history. I thought of his son cramming his face into a shelf of quilted toilet tissue in order to avoid me. I thought of a woman frying eggs in a carefree, slapdash way, untroubled when one of them broke in the pan; then the same woman, later, making a secret, horizontal gesture beneath a sunlit wisteria. And I thought of a cresting wave of water, lit by a moon, rushing past and vanishing upstream, pursued by a band of yelping students whose torch-beams criss-crossed in the dark. There is accumulation. There is responsibility. And beyond these, there is unrest. There is great unrest. (Barnes, 2011, p. 142)

Both approaches are distinctly illustrated by Barnes's assertion that the concepts of past events contribute to an individual's completeness, which is exemplified in the character Tony Webster, whose repressed traumatic memories ultimately serve as a reflection of his current self. Within the context of the narrative, the term signifies both the demise of Adrian Finn and one of the lads' buddies, Robson. Furthermore, it may be construed as alluding to the impending demise of elderly Tony Webster, who is nostalgically pursuing his personal history. In a broader context, the title's most profound significance appears to reside in its postmodern interpretation, which emphasizes the absence of a one truth or reality in this chaotic environment, instead suggesting the existence of multiple truths.

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